

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Existential Crisis in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

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Letter of Recommendation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

	Page
Chapter One: Introduction	1-8
1.1 Pinter as a dramatist	1
1.2 Existential Crisis as a theme	3
1.3 Review of Literature	4
1.4 Pinter and Absurdism	7
Chapter Two: Existentialism	9-24
2.1 The Theatre of the Absurd	21
Chapter Three: A Textual Analysis	25-42
3.1 Problem of Identity	25
3.2 Fear in character's mind	26
3.3 Absurd conversation/Dialogue	28
3.4 Theme of Isolation	35
3.5 Theme of uncertainty	38
Chapter four: Conclusion	44-48
Works cited	49-50

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Pinter as a Dramatist

Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930 in Hackney East London, England. He grew up in working class neighborhood. He was among the most influential British playwrights of modern times. Pinter's theatrical career began while he was attending Hackney Downs Grammar School. He is best known as an English playwright, Screenwriter, actor, director, political activist and poet. From 1952, he acted in repertory companies throughout England for about a dozen of years, using the stage name David Baron in the late 1950s. Beginning with his first play, *The Room* (1957), Pinter's writing career spanned over 50 years and produced Twenty-Nine original stage plays.

Pinter's best-known plays include, *The Birthday party* (1957), *The caretaker* (1959), *The home coming* (1964), and *Betrayal* (1978), each of which he adopted to film. His screenplay adoptions of other works include *The servant* (1963), *The Trial* (1993), and *Sleuth* (2007). (Wikipedia 13) Pinter's dramas often involve strong conflict among ambivalent characters who struggle for verbal and territorial dominance and for their own versions of the past. Stylistically, these works are marked by theatrical pauses and silences, irony and menace. In 1981, Pinter stated that he was not inclined to write plays explicitly about political subjects, yet in the mid-1980s he began writing overtly political plays, reflecting his own heightening political interests and changes in his personal life.

Pinter's first play, *The Room* written and first performed in 1957, was a student production at the university of Bristol and was directed by his good friend, actor Henry Woolf, who also originated the role of Mr. Kidd. Later, Pinter mentioned that

he had an idea for a play. Woolf asked him to write it so that he could direct it to fulfill a requirement for his post graduate work. Written in 1957 and produced in 1958 Pinter's second play, *The Birthday Party*, one of his best known works, was initially both a commercial and critical disaster.

Pinter opposed the politics of the cold war, leading to his decision to become a conscientious objector and to refuse to comply with national service in the British Military. But he was not a pacifist. He seemed to express ambivalence about politicians, in his 1966 Paris Review interview conducted by Lawrence M. Bensusan. Yet he had actually been an early member of the campaign for Nuclear disarmament in the United Kingdom and also had supported the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (1959-1994). He strongly opposed the 1991 Gulf war, the 1999 NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia during the Kosovo war, the United States 2001 war in Afghanistan, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Pinter received numerous awards. In addition to the Nobel Prize, he received the Tony Award for best play in 1967 for *The Home Coming*. He was given BAFTA awards, the French Legion d'honneur and twenty honorary degrees. He died from Liver cancer on 24 December 2008. He was buried at Kensal Green cemetery in North West London.

Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* was the playwright's first commercially produced, full-length play. He began writing the work after acting in a theatrical tour in East Bourne, England. Directed by Pinter himself, the finished full-length play premiered in Cambridge, England, at the Arts theatre, on April 28, 1958. There and on tour in Oxford it was quite successful. But when under the direction of Peter Wood, it moved to London and later opened on May 19 at the Lyric opera House in Hammersmith. It met with harsh reviews and closed down within a week (Wikipedia 16).

1.2 Existential Crisis as a Theme

Derived from Existentialism, Existential crisis is a stage of development at which an individual questions the very foundations of their life: whether their life has any meaning, purpose or value; whether their parents teaches and loved ones truly act in their best interest; whether the values they have been taught have any merit, and whether their religious upbringing may or may not be founded in reality. An existential crisis may result from: i) the sense of being alone and isolated in the world ii) a new found grasp or appreciation of one's mortality, iii) believing that one's life has no purpose or external meaning or awareness of one's freedom and the consequences of accepting or rejecting that freedom. Existential crisis is often provoked by a significant event in the person's life like marriage, separation, major loss, the death of a loved one; a life-threatening experience, psycho-active drug use; adult children leaving home; reaching a personally significant age. Usually it provokes the sufferer's introspection about personal Mortality. Existential crisis stems from a person's new perception of life and existence (Alasdair 145).

The Birthday party is about Stanley Webber, an erstwhile piano player in his thirties, who lives in a rundown Boarding house, run by Meg and Petey Boles, in an English Seaside town, probably on the south coast, not too far from London. Two sinister strangers Goldberg and McCann, who arrive supposedly on his birthday and who appear to have come looking for him, turn Stanley's apparently innocuous birthday party organized by Meg into a nightmare. Stanley is also the substitute child of the parents Meg and Petey. He temporarily fulfills their wish of having a male child. There is the quiet conflict between the characters to show their existence. In the play, when Stanley is being informed by Meg that the two visitors have visited their house, his response to them is purely negative; He wants to show his existence

towards the others. Not only Stanley, other characters are also roaming here and there for their existence.

The characters are obsessive to know their own background, having themselves been locked up inside a room. Around them is so dark that they cannot see even themselves, where they are standing and why and how they are there. In the play *The Birthday Party*, the central character, Stanley compels to face the crisis of his own identity. The party, which is going to be celebrated, is for Stanley's birthday but Stanley, who is the center of the party keeps on saying from the beginning that it is not his birthday and he has nothing to do with the party. Stanley does not recognize his own identity so that forcefully Meg is going to celebrate his birthday.

1.3 Review of Literature

Harold Pinter especially focuses his study on theme of loneliness, isolation and lack of communication. *The Birthday Party* is one of the examples of it. The play has been admired as well as criticized from different perspectives, regarding the issues of technique, theme.

Harold Hobson thought that Pinter had considerable originality and was "the most disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London" (19). However, his review appeared too late to do the production any good. The show was already off the boards, done in by a small attendance, including one matinee audience of six and persistently hostile reviews. Most critics opined that Pinter floundered in obscurity and suffered from the negative influence of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Eugene Ionesco's *The Bald Prima Donna* and other avant-garde writers. Pinter would later marvel at the fact that in London the play was completely massacred by the critics but noted that it was the only maltreatment he had received from reviewers and that it never dimmed his interest in writing. The work, in fact, became the dramatist's first full length

"comedy of menace," a group of plays that secured Pinter's reputation as premier, avant-garde playwright. Subsequent productions were much better received, including the play's 1964 revival at London's Aldwych Theatre and its 1968 Broadway Premier at the Booth Theatre in New York. By the mid-1960s, Pinter had secured *The Birthday Party* a reputation as a classic in the dramatic genre that literary critic Martin Esslin dubbed the Theatre of the Absurd.

Ruby Cohn writes, "Pinter has created his own distinctive and dramatic version of man vs. the system"(26). The characters' situations are revealed in their dramatic dimension. Characters seem distinct in their behaviors and activities. But the system is quite difficult. There is no collaboration between the character and the system. Moreover he further says:

Their Jewish- Irish names and dialects suggests a vaude ville skit, and it is not long before we realize that that skit is the Judaeo- Christian tradition as it appears in our present civilization. Goldberg is the senior partner; he utters the sacred clichés of family, class, prudence, proportion. Mccann is the brawany, yes- man whose strength reinforces Goldberg's doctrine. (31)

From these lines, he wants to show the religiosity of *The Birthday party* through the behaviors of the characters.

Another critic Nigel Alexander states:" In the course of the Birthday Party given by Meg for Stanley, characters' are not able in subjecting Stanley to a form of brain- washing". He views in the following lines about the play:

The ritual of the birthday party encourages self- expression and the trouble is that what usually gets expressed is the hatred and self-loathing that lurks in every individual. At the party all speak in

glowing terms of the past- especially Goldberg. Neither he nor the others can make it match the present or open away to the future. (99)

The characters in the play are unknown what is going to happen for them. Stanley, the main character does not know even his birthday. So, Pinter is not clear in his play regarding the characters.

Another critic John Russell Brown states:"Audience and readers do not know everything and what certainty there comes very late in the play" (87). His writing has tension, climax and is continually dynamic. He wants to create mystification by contrary statements. Russell comments Pinter's writing as follows:

Other repetitions in this passage still further suggest the drama underneath the seemingly inconsequential exchanges. Petey starts by evading any statement- 'what?' But his second speech begins with 'yes' as if he were intent on cutting off the exchange. he continues, however, with 'its' me', a repetition of the information given in 'yes', that is unnecessary and therefore seems insistent or, more likely, irritated or mocking. (Brown 88)

Thus, this research will search the problem of existence in the play. The present study will also concentrate on why and how the characters of the play are compelled to live. It is also related to the connection of the characters and their role. This is also helpful to understand the real identity of the characters in the play. The dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is of introductory part and it includes biography of the writer, analysis of the text and review of literature. The second chapter focuses on the theoretical background with the help of literary tool. The third chapter analyzes the text. And finally the fourth chapter presents the conclusion of this research on the basis of textual analysis in chapter three. I have taken necessary ideas from various

Sources related to the play *The Birthday Party*.

1.4 Pinter and Absurdism

The plays of Pinter, which constitute the theatre of the absurd, are obsessed with the futility of all action and the pointlessness of all directions. In Pinter's works as in Beckett's works, it is not only the words, which are not said that are important, the silences and the words, which are not said, are also equally important. Pinter's world, in fact is a presentation of the tragic and unavoidable confrontation of man against the world, which is an arbitrary and autonomous process of renovation and destruction. He creates a world that is absurd in the existential sense of being emptied of meaning. His characters are pathetically funny in their work. In most of his plays, the characters suffer from their own back groundlessness that is always in dreamlike state, confused and embarrassed. The characters in the play suffer from many problems. There is no identity of characters. There is the debate between them for searching the identity. Character's extreme -realization of 'Self' lead them towards the existential crisis. The experience which these characters undergo represents the overall condition of awkward men in an awkward land. Thus, 'The Theatre of Absurd' has been a major tool of analysis of this study.

Published in 1965, Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* dramatizes the existential struggle by the means of problem seen in the relationship among the characters of the play. We see some coldness in the relationship between Meg and Petey. Meg is talkative and inquisitive whereas Petey is reticent and evasive. Petey answers most of the time in mono syllables, very reluctantly and what Meg says is superfluous.

The Birthday Party, like pinter's other plays, has at every hook and cranny, situations of suspense and tone of whyness and whatness. For example, Goldberg and

McCann in *The Birthday Party* have no background of their problem. Their mission remains mysterious throughout the play. Another most mysterious character in the play is Stanley, who is the center of the party and who keeps on saying from the beginning of the play that it is not his birthday and he has nothing to do with the party. In such a way *The Birthday Party* supports the theme of absurdity where the characters are roaming here and there for getting their identity. In this context, Ronald Knowles opines "with his outstanding success by the early 1960s, Pinter was frequently associated with the social realism of the 'Angry young men' and with the absurdism of Beckett and Ionesco" (73).

CHAPTER TWO

Existentialism

In philosophy, the term 'exist' and 'existence' denote something active rather than 'passive' and thus are closely dependent on the Latin root 'ex' "out" + *Sistere* from *stare* 'to stand'. (Cuddon)

The term 'Existentialism' means pertaining to existence or in logic predicating to declare as true existence. Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship or lack of one with God. (Cuddon 15)

Existentialism came into prominence particularly in German and France as a philosophical movement or tendency after the world wars. The world wars gave rise to widespread feelings of despair and separation from the established order and gave rise to the term absurd. Existentialism emphasizes on the existence of human being, the lack of meaning and purpose in life and the solitude of human existence. It is based on individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge which are foregrounded in this philosophy. It stresses the concreteness and problematic character of human existence. Existentialism draws attention to the risk, the voidness of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dominate. It was during the Second World War, when Europe found itself in a crisis and faced with death and destruction, the existentialist movement began to flourish. "Existentialism is a set of philosophical ideals that stress the existence of the human being, the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life" (Lavine 322). Existentialism is less of an 'ism' than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of positions associated with existentialism, no single strict definition is possible;

however, it suggests a major theme that stresses on concrete individual human existence. Regarding its subjectivity, individual freedom and choice, Ryan explains existentialism thus:

Hence there is no single existentialist philosophy, and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with the existentialists the problem of man is central and that they stress man's concrete existence, his contingent nature, his personal freedom, and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be. (639)

Here Ryan especially emphasizes man's centrality in the study of existential issues. He denotes concrete existence through revolt. It is a revolt against traditional European philosophy which combines philosophy and science. Traditional philosophers produced knowledge that would be objective, universally true and certain. The existentialists do not go with the traditional attempt to get the ultimate nature of the world in abstract systems of thought. They point out the fact that every individual even the philosopher seeking absolute knowledge is only a limited human being. So, every individual has to take up important and difficult decisions with only limited knowledge and time in which he/she is compelled to make this decision. This human condition resides at the centre of the existentialists. They find human life as being basically a series of decisions that should be made with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are.

The existentialists conclude that human choice is subjective, because individuals finally must make their own choices without help from such external standards as laws ethical rules, or traditions. On this sense, Macintyre Alasdair says, "Even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose" (149). The existentialists

emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Furthermore, since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom and therefore their responsibility thrust upon them. As Sartre says they are "Condemned to be free" (skirbekk and Gilje 443).

Existentialism places the emphasis on the lack of meaning and purpose in life and the solitude of human existence. Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence. This implies that the human being has no essence, no essential self, and is no more than what he is. He is only the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved for himself.

The fundamental problem of existentialism is concerned with ontology, the study of being. The human being's existence is the first and basic fact; the human being has no essence that comes before his existence. The human being as a being is nothing. This nothingness and the non-existence is the central source of the freedom the human being faces in each and every moment.

The human being is condemned to be free because he is thrown into the world. The human being must take this freedom of being and the responsibility and guilt of his actions. Each action negates the other possible courses of action and their consequences; so the human being must be accountable without excuse. The human being must take decisions, assume responsibilities. There is no significance in this world. They cannot find any purpose in life: His existence is only a contingent fact. Human being's role in the world is not predetermined or fixed; every person is compelled to make a choice. Choice is one thing the human being must take. The trouble is that most often the human being refuses to choose. Hence, he cannot realize his freedom and the futility of his existence. Ryan summarizes this concept thus:

Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible only to himself. As with Nietzsche, Man creates moral values. Besides being free man is a finite and contingent being, existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is likewise expressed by the doctrine of 'the absurd'. Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

Basically existence is of two types: authentic and inauthentic. The authentic being is only rarely attained by humans; still it is what humans must strive to gain. The inauthentic (being-in-itself) is characteristically distinctive of things; It is what human being is diseased with his failure to act as a free agent and his impotency to reject bad faith. Things are only what they are. But human being is what he can be. The human being does not live in a predetermined world; the human being is free to realize his aims and his dreams.

Human being disguises himself from freedom by self-deception, acting like a thing, as if he is a passive subject, instead of realizing the authentic being for the human being; this is bad faith. In bad faith, the human being shelters himself from responsibility by not noticing the dimensions of alternative courses of action facing him. In bad faith, the human being imprisons himself within authenticity for he has refused to take the challenge of responsibility and the anxiety that comes along with his freedom. So, he makes a desperate attempt by taking resort in an anxiety.

Anxiety ascends from the human being's realization that destiny is not fixed but is open to an undetermined future of infinite possibilities and limitless scope. Anxiety is present at every moment of the human being's existence and it is part and parcel of authentic existence. Anxiety leads the human being to take decisions and to

be committed. The human being tries to avoid this anguish through bad faith.

Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, flourished after the devastating world wars. Cataclysm of the First World War was followed by the great economic depression of the thirties. Before healing such wounds, humanity saw the nuclear holocaust of the Second World War social and intellectual situation of that period was influenced by the Nietzschean declaration of the death of the God. People realized the lack of unity and order in the society. They couldn't believe in rationality. So, they denounced traditional form of norms and values. Faith on God had already begun to decline. There was no center or central authority that could bring peace and harmony in the world.

Existentialism, as a distinct philosophy began with the Danish Christian thinker, Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. He was critical of Hegel's philosophical system which analyzed being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. He swerved the study of philosophy to the subjective, emotional and living aspect of human existence as against Hegel's subjective and abstract academization of reality. He discussed man's essence with the existential predicaments and limitations, hope, despair and anxiety. Kierkegaard takes human being as god's creatures and offers many possibilities of being. Truth is far away for the individual if he does not create it himself in his actions. Christianity alone is capable of providing a rule of guidance because it alone is capable of teaching man, what is his real and fundamental nature of making him understand his relation to eternity. Without reasons of heart or mind, Kierkegaard can only get to God by a leap of faith. This is the equivalent to the act of will in the classic existentialists. A leap of faith-attains no reasons to what it does and so the position of faith remains irrational.

The Christian doctrine and its quest for objective truth have nothing to do with the kierkegaardian concept of Christianity. Kierkegaard believes only in the existence of God, and not in any other doctrine. He argues "Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, but the fact that God has existed" (faith 857). Kierkegaardian faith is paradoxical. When we believe in God, we believe both in his finite and infinite existence. Kierkegaard sees the whole world as a corporation of ambiguities and paradoxes. On the difficulty of existing in such paradoxical condition Kierkegaard writes:

Existing is ordinarily regarded as no very complex matter, much less an art, since we all exist; but abstract thinking takes rank as an accomplishment. But really to exist, so as to interpenetrate one's existence with consciousness, at one and the same time eternal and as if far removed from existence, and yet also present in existence and in the process of becoming; that is truly difficulty. (814)

Therefore, for him, real existence is possible only when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of God, Christianity and man.

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of the German phenomenologist Frenz Brento (1838-1917) and Edmund Husserl (1895-1938). They were immediately followed by the modern existentialists. In this century, German existentialism was represented by martin Heidegger (1889-1979). The most forceful voice of existentialist thought were the works of the French existentialists: Sartre and Albert Camus. No one has contributed more to the popularization of existentialism of this philosophical trend than Sartre.

Although the classic forms of existentialism are characteristic of post-world war-II philosophy, literature and art, we have already seen with Dostoevsky (1821-

1881) that Existentialist-like ideas were anticipated long before. Before Dostoevsky, there were real existentialists. The most important was certainly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche focused precisely on the non-existence of God as implying the non-existence of all value in one of the most famous saying in the history of philosophy, God is dead. He is a sharp critic of religion especially of Christianity. He called Christianity a "Slave morality" and maintained that religion provides no truth because God is dead and Christianity has become the shelter of weak and disabled people. In his famous essay *The Death of God and the Antichrist* Nietzsche writes:

The Christian conception of God-God as God of sick, God as a spider, God as spirit is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the low water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yes! God as a declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to life! (912)

Nietzsche proposes, in the absence of God, the concept of the superman and the will-to-power. The superman is the higher man above the herd and is free from any restrictions imposed by society. Nietzsche also rejects the concern for the welfare of the crowd and establishment of common good or herd-desire. The man who is in search of a general truth acceptable by the culture and society is an objective man-a mirror. He is no more than a self-less object that waits other's recognition and evaluation subjective will. He thought that the man of action is an inevitable force for the human existence.

Nietzsche regards God as a human construct and a means of suppression and exploitation. For those who are powerful, God doesn't matter. But for those, who are

weaker, God is a shelter. Religion is a corrupt concept. It is a weapon to exploit the weaker section of society. Individuals are compelled to surrender before God when they are in some difficulty. Thus, the existence is subjected to God. For him, to believe on God is against life and humanity.

Jean Paul Sartre is the hierophant of modern existentialism and his version, expressed through his novels, plays and philosophical writings, is the one that has caught on and been the most widely influential. He is also known as the existential philosopher and propounder of modern existentialism in the mid 20th century.

Sartre finds valuable philosophical materials in Descartes subjectivism, Husserl's analysis of consciousness, Heidegger's existentialist concepts and themes and also in the two major forerunners of existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. From Kierkegaard, Sartre takes the emphasis upon individual conscious existence; From Nietzsche, he takes the concept of the death of God. Sartre's originality lies in his reinterpreting, revising and reworking of these Materials into a bold new integration which became the center of French existentialism.

Sartre always tries to contrast the divine viewpoint of the world with human nature. It is supposed that god created everything and gave existence to the essence. But Sartre, who was the atheist unlike Kierkegaard, claimed that existence is prior to essence because of the absence of god, since there is no god there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. This is the fundamental proposition for existentialism. For Sartre, the essence is whatever we decide it is going to be. "A World without purpose, value, or meaning is literally senseless, worthless, empty and hopeless" (Rose 2). So, the World is absurd for the existentialists. Now as existentialism is popular, many people think of the world as absurd and behaviours without limitations, everything in the absurd world actually is empty and pointless.

Sartre's main tenet is that 'existence precedes essence'. This means that there is no such thing as human nature, no platonic form of human kind for each individual to be measured against. "Each man is a blank slate on which he will, by his actions, come to define his own being" (Willey 152). He wrote *The Critic of Dialectical Reason* (1960) that discusses Marxism with Existentialism.

Sartre divides existentialist thinkers into two groups, theistic and atheistic. The theistic group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel who are supposed to believe in Christian faith. In the atheistic group, Sartre puts himself with Heidegger, Nietzsche and other French existentialists who do not believe in the existence of God. The atheistic existentialists discard the concept of God as an authentic shelter. They regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. The absence of God implies the loss of value.

Sartre intellectually associates himself with Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86) as his life-long companion to the philosophical outlook. However, to think that she is very close to Sartre in the sense that her thoughts are a mere duplication of Sartre would be a mistake. She gives an original and independent interpretation of existentialism, though not radically different from Sartre's. Unlike him, she chooses to concentrate on the personal and moral aspects of life. She attempted to apply existentialism to feminism. Sartre it should be remembered, Failed to produce his promised work on ethics. Beauvoir treats existentialism from very much a feminist point of view.

In Sartre's vision Man is born into a kind of Void, a mud. He has the liberty to remain in this mud and thus leads a passive supine, acquiescent existence in a 'semi conscious' state and in which he is scarcely aware of himself. However, he may come out of his subjective, passive situation become increasingly aware of him and

conceivably; if so, he would then have a sense of the absurdity of his predicament and utter despair. The energy deriving from this awareness would enable him to 'drag himself out of the mud' and begin to exist.

As human existence is self-conscious without being predefined, we as autonomous beings are 'condemned to be free' - compelled to make future directed choices. Every individual simply follows custom of social expectations in order to escape this angst; we have escaped the responsibility of making our own choice, of creating our own essence. We are free to create our own interpretation of ourselves in relation to the world, to create a project of possibilities, of authentic actions as the expression of freedom. In *Existentialism est unhumanisme* (1946) Sartre expressed the belief that man can emerge from this passive and indeterminate condition and by an act of will, become engaged, where upon he is committed to some action and part structure for his existence and thus helps to integrate society:

In 1946, Sartre founded the review *Les Temps Modernes*, a medium for existentialist writing. Apart from Sartre, some of the main exponents of existentialism have been Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Merleau Ponty and Jean Wahl. The main exponent of Christian existentialism has been Gabriel Marcel, the philosopher and dramatist who has written some brilliant critical analyses of Sartre's point of view and who, in his *Existence et objective* (1925) was very probably the first to introduce the term 'existentialism' into the vocabulary of French philosophy, Marcel's influence has been discernible in the work of some French novelists notably Jean Cayrol and Louis Estang.

(Cuddon 316-17)

Everyman is what he chooses to be or makes himself. He cannot Escape responsibility for his character or his deeds by claiming that they are the pre-determined consequences of factors beyond his power to control or resist, nor can he justify what he does in terms of external or 'objective' standards imposed upon him from without Sartre, in particular insists upon the notion of the individual as the source of all value and as being obliged to choose for himself what to do and what standard to adopt or reject.

Existentialist typically gives priority to sincerity and creativity in the moral like, sometimes appear to regard any decision as justified if it is made a perfect honesty and with absolute inner conviction. Critics have pointed out that existentialist ethics seems to provide little guidance to particular choices. The bare reference to 'authenticity' is hardly helpful in the assessment of the relative merits of alternative courses of action.

The absurdity of human existence is a central principle in Albert Camus' (1913-60) works. He is another proponent of French Existentialism. Existentialism in the 20th century reflects the loss of certainties in the post-modern world. If there are no clear philosophical answers to the question of existence, then each individual has to design their own life as a project. The choice and responsibility of that project falls entirely on them. Camus was concerned with the freedom and responsibility of the individual, the alienation of the individual, the alienation of the individual from society and the difficulty of facing life without the comfort of believing in God or in absolute moral standards. The work of Camus is usually associated with Existentialism because of the prominence in it of such themes as the apparent absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe, and the necessity of engagement in a just cause.

Camus thought that human existence is absurd. The modern existence is full of injustice; millions work in repetitive exploitative jobs. He thought that we should rebel against these absurdities by refusing to participate in them. In the '*Myth of Sisyphus*', Camus perceives the condition of modern man totally absurd and similar to that of Corinthian king Sisyphus. Sisyphus, who because of his disobedience to God and his passion for life suffered eternal torture heroically, is a martyr and teachers to all modern men. The only truth for Camus, is that the world is absurd and unintelligible. But suicide cannot be the solution to this discomfort of absurd condition. Thus, he believes in fraternity and humanity rather than nihilism. Further he explains the concept in these words:

Suicide is repudiation. The absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end deplete himself. The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day to revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance. (827)

Suicide is not an appropriate revolt against the injustice and absurd condition of man. Human being feels estranged and tries to deplete him. But, it is not the ultimate solution of his absurd condition and dreadful situation. Camus hates the destruction of the world and mankind. To get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go to the rules of God or he may submit himself in the hands of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living of the absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The world is full of absurdity, but Sisyphus teaches revolt through action that offers freedom and justification for continuing life. People began to think the world as absurd and behavior without limitations when existentialism was popular. But existentialism tried

to experiment on the true consequences of such as absurd world, and everything else in it, is actually empty and pointless. Existentialist thinkers begin from the human situation in the world, the modes of existence, the condition of despair and the human being's tendency.

2.2 The Theatre of the Absurd

The term 'Theatre of the Absurd' was introduced by the theatre critic Martin Esslin. It assumes that the world is meaningless, meaning is human construct and individuals themselves must create significance not relying on institution and tradition to provide it.

Existentialism is a post-war philosophy of which the essence is that the universe is void, individuals are to face the emptiness of the universe and create meaning in life which, in fact, is not the essential meaning in itself. Before the world wars, unity, certainty, morality, rationality, faith, Christianity and other virtues ruled the world. The world virtues all shattered into fragments. This 20th century existentialist thinking was conceived long before by the thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky and others in 19th century. The term existentialism was however, used by Jean Paul Sartre.

As the old concepts of unity, certainty, objectivity and values have failed, the world is filled with despair, anxiety, uncertainty and solitariness. The term existentialism has been used to describe “a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship or lack of it with God” (Cuddon 319). Existentialism is quest of the plight of human being in the universe. It is most probably the only dynamic philosophical movement to define and interpret the anxieties and uncertainties of human existence. Existentialist themes are displayed in the Theatre of the Absurd, notably in Samuel Beckett's *waiting for Godot*, in which

two men divert themselves while they wait expectantly for someone (or something) named Godot who never arrives. They claim Godot to be an acquaintance but in fact hardly know him, admitting they would not recognize him if they saw him. Samuel Beckett, once asked who or what Godot is, replied, if I knew, I would have said so in the play. "To occupy themselves they eat, sleep, talk, argue, sing, play games and contemplate suicide anything to hold the terrible silence at bay" (76). The play exploits several archetypal forms and situations, all of which lend themselves to both comedy and pathos. The play also illustrates an attitude toward man's experience on earth.

The Theatre of the absurd which assumes the world human existence and all human activities futile and meaningless. It neither exposes any intellectual problem nor provides any clear cut solution. The Theatre of the Absurd is essentially concerned with images that communicate to the audience, the sense of perplexity and uncertainty. It presents the world as senseless and lacking a unifying principle. It expresses the anxiety and despair feeling. It has the therapeutic value.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* regarded as most representative play. Absurd theatre has neither action and plot nor any logical dialogue. The whole play remains at the same situation it started. It is a powerful presentation of the timeless, circular and barren human world and it has no plot development. It opens with Estragon saying "no thing to be done," (32) and ends with similar expressions. Thus, *Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation.

Arthur Adamov, in The Theatre of the absurd, depicts a senseless and brutal nightmare world throughout his plays. *La Invasion* is a play about the hopeless search for meaning the quest for a message. Pierre, one lonely character of the play wants to retire to his own private den.

Likewise, another absurd dramatist Genet's theatre may lack plot, character, coherence or social truth. Genet's theatre is profoundly, a theatre of social protest yet, like that of Ionesco and Adamov. It resolutely rejects political commitment, political argument, and didacticism or propaganda. In dealing with the dream world of the out cast of society, it explores the human search for meaning and reality the abandonment of the concepts of character and motivation. His plays are not intellectual exercises but the projection of a world of private myth.

Pinter being impressed by the Beckettian and Kafkasque absurdity presents the human being helplessly trapped in a vast and incomprehensible universe. In a way, absurdity is manifest in the lack of purpose and direction, certainty and continuity, Consistency and stability in human, life. Harold Pinter shares with Beckett and Ionesco certain elements of the absurd drama the violation of the Aristotelian principles of cause and effect; the inconsistency in identity and actions of characters the un-verifiability of situations, repetition of inconsequential actions, disjointed dialogues and multiple patterns of meaning. On the other hand, Existential crisis is a common theme in absurd drama. The absurd dramas hardly present the conventional heroes in their dignified position. The characters like those of the plays of the *Angry Young Man* School are anti-heroes, weak, gloomy depressed, effeminate and confused with them. Absurd plays do not have a multiplicity of characters. That is why the characters are always found busy doing most insignificant activities or doing nothing but only waiting like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Theatre of the absurd represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre like ancient Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery plays and Baroque art sacramental the ultimate realities concerned were generally known and universally accepted metaphysical systems. As the theatre of the absurd is not concerned with conveying

information or presenting the problems or destinies of character that exist outside of the author's inner world, it is not concerned with the representation of events the narration of the fate or the adventures of characters. In the Theatre of Absurd, the audience is confronted with actions that lack apparent motivation. Character's that are in constant flux and often happenings that are clearly outside the realm of rational experience.

CHAPTER – THREE

Existential crisis in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*

An Existential crisis is the main theme in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday party*. The problem in the play is of Existence. The characters suffer from Existence. They move here and there to find their identity. Characters seem in isolated condition. The following points will support existential crisis in the play.

3.1 Problem of identity

Problem of identity is the main theme in the play *The Birthday Party*.

Characters cannot express their mission freely. It is because they are unknown each other. The characters are obsessive to know their own background having themselves been locked up inside a room. Characters cannot see one another due to darkness. In the play "*The Birthday Party*" the central character, Stanley is compelled to face the crisis of his own identity. The party, which is going to be celebrated, is for Stanley's birthday but Stanley, who is the center of the party keeps on saying from the beginning that it is not his birthday and he has nothing to do with the party. Because of the communication gap of all characters, birthday party is going to be celebrated though Stanley is unaware of his own birthday. Stanley does not recognize his own identity but Meg is going to celebrate his birthday forcefully as reflected in the following text:

MEG. It's your birthday, Stan. I was going to keep it a secret
until tonight.

STANLEY. No.

MEG. It is. I've brought you a present. (She goes to the sideboard
picks up the parcel and places it on the table in front of him
go on. Open it.

STANLEY. What's this?

MEG. It's your present.

STANLEY. This isn't my birthday, Meg.

MEG. Of course it is. Open your present. (36)

Goldberg and McCann's condition also seems like Stanley's. Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party* also have no background of their profession. The mystery is woven in such a way that not only the audience but also themselves do not know whom they are working for. We can see that characters are in mysterious condition. Mystery is prevailing in the voice of all characters. Therefore, their mission remains mysterious throughout the play. Suspense and mystification can be seen in these following lines:

STANLEY. What?

MEG. The fried bread

STANLEY. Succulent.

MEG. You shouldn't say that word.

STANLEY. What word?

MEG. That word you said.

STANLEY. What succulent? (17)

In this way, we are clear that the obscurity and search of identity is prevailing in the play. It seems as if the characters are participating for their identification. There is lack of communication also. Though, they talk with each other they themselves are unknown of their profession. Characters are running for their existence.

3.2 Fear in Characters' Mind

Fear is also one of the most important themes of absurdity which is seen in the characters mind. Embarrassment, uncertainty, anxieties, menace and restlessness are linked with the causes and effect of the theme Fear.

In *The Birthday Party*, this theme of fear is woven everywhere with every moment of suspense. This fear especially concentrates on Stanley. Stanley is almost all the times, frightened, depressed, embarrassed and simultaneously indifferent; He at the beginning seemed unsafe and self-contemplative. The feeling of anxiety and tension is everywhere in the play:

STANLEY. (advancing). They're coming today. They're coming
in a van.

MEG. Who?

STANLEY. And do you know what they've got in that van?

MEG. What?

STANLEY. They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.

MEG. (breathlessly). They haven't.

STANLEY. oh yes they have.

MEG. you're a liar.

STANLEY. (advancing upon her). A big wheelbarrow. And when the
van tops they wheel it out, and they wheel it up the garden path,
and then they knock at the front door.

MEG. They don't

STANLEY. They're looking for someone.

MEG. They're Not.

STANLEY. They're looking someone. A certain person.

MEG. (hoarsely). No, they're not!

STALEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?

MEG. No.

STALEY. you don't want me to tell you?

MEG. you're a liar!(15)

These above lines indicate the feeling of fear in Stanley's mind. Though, Meg is explaining Stanley about the truth, Stanley doesn't believe in her views. He is so frightened from them. The theme of mystery is very powerfully, interwoven and inseparable from any line of this play. When Stanley and Meg talk about their conversation, we do not know what it is they are talking about. Situation also creates atmosphere of menace and fear everywhere.

3.3 Absurd Conversation /Dialogue

One of the most generalized themes of the play is absurd conversation between different characters. When two people meet for the first time, the terms of address they adopt for each other serve to define their mutual relationship and the situation. In Pinter's plays the characters suffer from non-communication that all character keep repeating the same question time and again. In the beginning of The Birthday Party, Meg and Petey are talking which seemed absurd.

MEG. Is that you, Petey?

Pause.

Petey, is that you?

Pause.

Petey?

PETEY. what?

MEG. Is that you?

PETEY. Yes, it's me.

MEG. What? (Her face appears at the hatch)

Are you back?

PETEY. yes.

MEG. I've got your cornflakes ready. (She disappears and reappears)

Here's your cornflakes. (9)

Seeing the dialogue between Meg and Petey, We come to know that they have no anything else than remaining in silence or repeating the same question even after receiving the answer each time. The above conversation shows the absurdity of the characters' conversations. They are searching their identity. There is also the communication gap between them.

The same type of repetitiveness also occurs in the play between the dialogues of the characters.

PETTY. Very nice.

MEG. I knew it was.

PETEY. (turning to her). Oh, Meg, two men came up to me on the
each last night.

MEG. Two men?

PETEY. Yes. they wanted to know if we could put them up for a
couple of nights.

MEG. Put them up? Here?

PETEY. Yes

MEG. How many men?

PETEY. Two

MEG. What did you say?

PETEY. Well, I said I didn't know. So they said they'd come round to
find out.

MEG. Are they coming? (12)

When the characters suffer from communication gap and identity crisis they do not see any meaning in the world and they are compelled to live in the world of meaninglessness. Pinter throughout the play presents the absurdity of life through a technique of dialogue which is repetitive and uncertain. Stanley, one of the most important and representative of Pinter's characters remains totally silent and in another side Meg over speaks in the play. It shows that the situation is self-contained, and there is no unification of the actions for the play to be a single identity. The language spoken by all the characters in the play seems repetitive, stereo typic and full of pauses and silences which is very close to absurdity.

The play *The Birthday Party* is full of absurd and irrelevant dialogues. We can see abrupt questions and abrupt answers in which characters are busy most of the times in the play.

MEG. (defensively). What do you mean?

STANLEY. You're a bad wife.

MEG. I'm not. Who said I am?

STANLEY. Not to make your husband a cup of tea. Terrible.

MEG. He knows I'm not a bad wife

STANLEY. Giving him sour milk instead.

MEG. It wasn't sour.

STANLEY. Disgraceful.

MEG. You mind your own business, any way (STANLEY eats.) You won't find many better wives than me, I can tell you. I keep a very nice house and I keep it clean. (16)

In the conversation between these characters, they are not talking on serious matters, meaningful and logically sound so that one couldn't find out the exact

message or the meaning of the sentence. Audiences cannot know the true message and the identity of the characters. They are unclear what is going to happen in the play. Though characters are engaged in communicative activities, message is not conveyed. It is void. Characters' voice seems silent in their communicative activities. In Pinter's plays we can see many types of components. He lets his characters play different games- like 'blind man's buff' in the play. In the game, the figure of the blind man shows or suggests the dark mysterious force. Conversations are useful to understand the seeking of existence:

LULU. (to GOLDBERG) you're the bad image of the first man I ever loved.

GOLDBERG. It goes without saying.

MEG. (rising) I want to play a game!

GOLDBERG. A game?

LULU. What game?

MEG. Any game.

LULU. (jumping up). Yes, let's play a game.

GOLDBERG. What game?

MCCANN. Hide and Seek..

LULU. Blind Man's buff.

MEG. Yes!

GOLDBERG. You want to play blind man's buff? (62)

The conversation symbolizes the absurd situation of human beings. Scenes are often involving strong conflicts among ambivalent characters who struggle for verbal and territorial dominance and for their own versions of the past. The last scene seems dark and strange in which Stanley remains unmoved, and other characters McCann

and Goldberg are commanding Stanley by saying some suggestive dialogues. Stanley only listens carefully and he seems patient, silent. We are in confusion whether he is careful, attentive towards them or absent from there. It is one of the ridiculous conditions in the scene:

MCCANN. Out of our own pockets.

GOLDBERG. It goes without saying. Between you and me, Stan, it's about time you had a new pair of glasses.

MCCANN. you can't see straight.

GOLDBERG. It's true you're even more cockeyed.

GOLDBERG. He's right you've gone from bad to worse.

MCCANN. Worse than worse.

GOLDBERG. You need a long convalescence.

MCCANN. A change of air.

GOLDBERG. somewhere over the rainbow.

MCCANN. where angles fear to tread.

GOLDBERG. Exactly.

MCCANN. You're in a rut.

GOLDBERG. You look anemic.

MCCANN. Rheumatic.

GOLDBERG. Epileptic. (82)

These two strangers Goldberg and McCann treat Stanley as an object.

Comparatively, the condition of Stanley is very poor.

We can see not only the language of social progress, language of existential survival but a language of divisive strategy. Pinter introduces the meaning by giving the most potent words. Different kinds of dialogues are also useful to understand the

clear meaning of the play. Conversation also clarifies the meaningless condition of the characters in the play:

MEG. (Coming downstage) the car's gone.

PETEY. Yes

MEG. Have they gone?

PETEY. yes.

MEG. Won't they be in for lunch?

PETEY. No.

MEG. Oh, what a shame. (She puts her bag on the table). It's hot out.

(She hangs her coat on a hook) what are you doing.

PETEY. Reading

MEG. Is it good?

PETEY. All right.

MEG. Where's stan? (86)

Communication gap is one of the predominant factors in the conversation between them. The conversation clarifies that Meg is unaware about where Stanley has already been taken out by Mccann and Goldberg. Meg thinks as if Stanley is still sleeping. It is because of gap in communication. Pinter presents how the fighting of existence is prevailing through the dialogue and conversation in the play. Due to the fear also we can see the removal of characters. Through the dialogues, conversations and expressions of the Pinter's characters in *The Birthday Party*, we see how we cannot accurately express our feelings and thoughts and how we don't accurately understand what others say in our actual life:

PETEY. No thanks.

GOLDBERG. (pouring tea) That car? That car's never let me down.

MEG. Are you going to go for a ride?

GOLDBERG. Does not answer, drinks his tea.

MEG. Well, I'd better be off now. (She moves to the back door and turns.) PETEY, when Stanley Comes down.....

PETEY. yes?

MEG. Tell him I won't be long.

PETEY. I'll tell him.

MEG. (Vaguely). I won't be long (she exits). (31)

In this way, the characters are doing nothing important on the stage, engaged in non-sense language and activities, which strike us with an awareness of existence in the play. In the play, Stanley's social identity has become disjointed and McCann determine his identity, which is devoid of purpose It is mentioned like this in the play:

MCCANN. Who are you? Webber?

GOLDBERG. What makes you think you exist?

MCCANN. You are dead.

GOLDBERG. You are dead. You can't live. You can't think you cannot love. You are dead. You are a plague on bad.

There's no juice in you. You are nothing but an odor! (34)

Though, Staley is still alive, Goldberg and McCann determine his death in the sense that Stanley becomes silent in front of them without uttering any voice. In the play, Stanley has been presented as an unidentified person which is mentioned as in the text:

GOLDBERG. (Crossing to him) Webber. (Quietly.) SIT DOWN.

(Silence. STANLEY begins to whistle "The Mountains of Morne".

He strolls casually to the chair at the table. They watch him. He stops whistling. Silence. He sits.)

STANLEY. You'd better be careful.

GOLDBERG. Webber, What were you doing yesterday?

STANLEY. Yesterday?

GOLDBERG. And the day before. What did you do the day before that? (47)

3.4 Theme of Isolation

Another most powerful characteristic theme of *The Theatre of the Absurd* is the theme of isolation which we find in *The Birthday Party*. In the play, the stage direction, the manners and the language of the characters always cut them off from each other and leave them inherently and originally lonely and isolated. Because of their feeling of alienation, the characters are strangers not only to each other but with the surroundings. The characters that are presented in such a way make them unaware of their own existence.

Though McCann and Stanley are not familiar to each other, McCann tries to declare Stanley's identity. Stanley does not want to spend even an hour with McCann but forcefully they are going to organize the party of Stanley's. As a result, Stanley is alienated from himself which are shown in the following lines:

STANLEY. Who are the other guests?

MCCANN. A young lady.

STANLEY. Oh yes? And?

MCCANN. My friend.

STANLEY. Your Friend?

MCCANN. That's right it's all laid on.

Stanley walks round the table towards the door. McCann meets him.

STANLEY. Excuse me.

MCCANN. Where are you going?

STANLEY. I want to go out.

MCCANN. Why don't you stay here? (39)

Feeling of alienation creates Stanley to remain alone. Despite an earnest request from Meg to be happy with her, Stanley wants to remain alone. Stanley arrives as a guest in her house. Though, Stanley and Meg are involved in communicative activities there is not communication. It is because of alienation. This alienation creates existential problem in the play:

MEG. Stan?

STANLEY. What?

MEG (Shyly). Am I really succulent?

STANLEY. Oh, you are. I'd rather have you than a cold in the nose any day.

MEG. you're just saying that.

STANLEY. (violently.) Look why don't you get this place cleared up! it's a pigsty.

MEG. Is the sun shining? What are you smoking?

STANLEY. A Cigarette. (19)

There is communication gap among the characters. Feeling of alienation emerged in the psyche of Stanley. Throughout the whole play, Stanley struggles hard and tries to come into the existence. When he talks, he keeps boasting of himself and tries to prove his real identity. Despite all his efforts, Stanley is finally dispossessed and thrown off from that house and make him silent. In such a way, he is again back

with his loneliness to confront the hostility of the outside. Because of the existential crisis in the play, Stanley finally is compelled to live absurd life. It is stated in the following lines:

MCCANN. (Savagely, hitting his arm.) Don't do that!

STANLEY. Listen. you knew what I was talking about before, didn't you?

MCCANN. I don't know what you are at all.

STANLEY. It's a mistake! do you understand?

MCCANN. You are in a bad state, man.

STANLEY. (Whispering, advancing). Has he told you any thing? Do you know what you are here for? Tell me. you need n't be frightened of me. or has not he told you?

MCCANN. Told me what?

STANLEY. (Hissing) I have explained to you, damn you, that all those years I lived in Basing toke I never stepped outside the door.

MCCANN. You know, I am flabbergasted with you. (42)

In the play, the communication that the characters have in the play is difficult and irrelevant. Stanley seems silent in some case. When Goldberg and Mccann are talking about Stanley he only makes sounds from his throat which seems unusual:

GOLBERG. I said animals. (He turns back to STANLEY.) You will be able to make or break, Stan. by my life.

STANLEY. Well? What do you say?

GOLDBERG. What do you think? Eh boy?

MCCANN. What's your opinion sir? of this prospect sir?

GOLDBERG. Prospect. sure. Sure it's a prospect.

STANLEY. Uh-gug--- Uh-gug----

eeehhh-gag----(on the breath)

Cahh-----cahh-----

They watch him. He draws a long breath which shudders down his body. He concentrates.

GOLDBERG. Well stanny boy, what do you say eh?

STANLEY. ug-gughh-----uh----gughhhh-----

MCCANN. Mr. Webber! what's your opinion? (85)

3.5 Theme of Uncertainty

The play *The Birthday Party* indicates the lack of coherence purposelessness and very miserable life. The place especially is in a boarding house. The room is cluttered with miscellaneous objects small cupboard paint buckets, boxes containing a stepladder. The language is often illogical, symbols and images are used excursively. The characters let the language flow as it comes. The audience is not confronted with own language and pre-occupations. The language is exaggerated and heightened. The characters repeat the same words phrases and often sentences which are near to uncertainty in the play:

MEG. Are they nice?

PETEY. Very nice.

MEG. I thought they'd be nice (she sits at the table.) you got your paper?

PETEY. Yes.

MEG. Is it good?

PEETY. Not bad.

MEG. What does is say?

PETEY. Nothing much. (10)

The same scenes appear repeatedly in the play. Very often, characters talk in an unnatural way. Language is used as a means of diversion. Pinter exposes emptiness in human being by creating such conversations. The characters are involved in childish and absurd activities and take fun of them:

GOLDBERG. Thank you.

MEG. (to McCann) do you think I should?

GOLDBERG. Lulu, You're a big bouncy girl. Come and sit on my lap.

MACCAN. Why not?

LULU. Do you think I should?

GOLDBERG. Try it.

MEG. (Sipping).Very nice.

LULU. I will bounce up to the ceiling

MCCANN. I don't know how you can mix that stuff.

GOLDBERG. Take a chance.

MEG. (to McCann). Sit down on this tool. (58)

The main character Stanley is in existential crisis. He is pushed to the state of existential choice but finds no way out. He is in insecure position. The characters can not maintain good support among them.

The play indicates that the world is no more receptive for living. Its gloomy atmosphere here and there in a silent world of the play indicates purposelessness and incoherence. Its ultimate message in human life is purposeless and existence is meaningless. The life of the characters that represent people in the modern world

seems absurd because no actions progresses and change takes place in their lives despite number of events. It is the indication of futility of human efforts in the world:

STANLEY. The Christmas before last.

GOLDBERG. Where?

STANLEY. Lyons corner house.

GOLDBERG. Which one?

STANLEY. Marble Arch.

GOLDBERG. Where was your wife?

STANLEY. In

GOLDBERG. Answer.

STANLEY. (Turning, Crouched.) What wife?

GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife? (49)

The characters are illusive. Their actual identity is not obvious. The characters seem quite interested to do something but ironically they can not begin anything.

All events in the play reflect tragic human situation. The play depicts successfully the picture of human condition as Camus has done in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

MCCANN. Well?

STANLEY. Right. Now you've both had a rest you can get out!

MCCANN. (rising). That's a dirty trick! I will kick the shite out of him!

GOLDBERG. (Rising) No! Ive stood up.

MCCANN. Sit down again!

GOLDBERG. Once I'm up. I'm up.

STANLEY. Same Here.

MCCANN. (moving to Stanley). You've made Mr. Goldberg stand up.

STANLEY. (his voice rising). It'll do him good! (47)

The play is very close to uncertainty. The play also shows the condition of modern man. The condition of modern man is bitter, meaningless and absurd. In the play, there is confusion in every step of life. One is left in a destitute, desperate and helpless situation. The course of life is quite mysterious. There is no progress. Such things signify the rise of great uncertainty in human life:

MEG. I'm going to wake that boy.

PEETY. There's a new show coming to the Palace.

MEG. On the pier?

PETEY.No. the Palace, in the town.

MEG. Stanley could have been in it, if it was on the pier.

PETEY. This is a straight show.

MEG. What do you mean?

PETEY. No dancing or singing. (13)

The play *The Birthday Party* is a plotless drama. It has disjunctive structure yet it is the reflection of disjunctive pattern of life which the characters have. Through this, it flashes the disjunctive modern life. Events occur but the situation does not progress. Pinter has written the play in experimental mode. So, we don't find convention of realistic plays. The play begins in uncertainty. It proceeds through banal communication, absurd activities and ends in surprise. The readers can not determine exposition, climax and resolution in the play. Frequently occurring pauses, silences and ellipse in the middle of dialogues make the happenings more mysterious. Mystery also germinates uncertainty, which is seen in the following lines:

PEETY. Someone's just had a baby.

MEG. Oh, they haven't! Who?

PETEY. Some girl.

MEG. Who, Petey, who?

PETEY. I don't think you'd know her.

MEG. What's her name?

PETEY. Lady Mary Splatt.

MEG. I don't know her.

PETEY. No.

MEG. What is it? (11)

The play begins with uncertainty and ends in uncertainty. Stanley, in the opening scene, sits alone in the room which represents uncertainty. All the characters seem in the same situation. Stanley gets many chances to do activities but to his bad luck, he is left in the desperate situation. He faces many kinds of problems in his living which is seen as follows:

LULU. The lights !

GOLDBERG. What's happened?

LULU. The lights!

MCCANN. Wait a minute.

GOLDBERG. Where is he?

MCCANN. Let go of me!

GOLDBERG. Who's this?

LULU. Someone's touching me!

MCCANN. Where is he?

MEG. Why has the light gone out? (64)

The play covers morning, night but nothing happens in the play. A number of events occur in the course of the play but the action does not progress. The characters can not maintain good rapport among them. Everything remains in uncertainty. It shows that there is problem in existence.

CHAPTER – FOUR

Conclusion

The Birthday Party was presented in May 1958 by Michael Codron at Lyric, Hammersmith, where it bewildered the critics of the daily papers and had already been taken off before, the Sunday times appeared with a glowing review by Harold Hobson. The play was revived in May 1959 by the Tavistock repertory company at the Tower Theatre.

The Birthday Party opens in the living dining area of a seedy rooming house at an unnamed seaside resort in England. Petey and Meg Boles are two important characters. Their talk is insane, centering on their tenant, Stanley Webber. Petey also tells her of two strangers who might come to rent a room. Meg decides to wake Stanley for breakfast and goes to his room. Unshaven and half dressed, Stanley comes downstairs and sits at the table to eat. After petey goes off to work, Stanley teases Meg about her "Succulent" fried bread. But when she becomes affectionate, he gets irritated and complains that her tea is muck and the place is a pigsty.

In the play *The Birthday Party*, Pinter doesn't concern to any clear objective but only the scene of fear, feeling of alienation, anxiety and loneliness which we find in our real life. All characters are unknown as well as they face feeling of anxiety. They cannot understand the meaning of each other characters. There is no real event happening in all the scenes.

The main character Stanley in the play is captured with the fear of losing his own social identity. He seems almost in the mood of depression, frighten and indifferent than others. The feeling of insecurity, anxiety and impatience are some of the proofs which are matched in the character of Stanley. All are unknown about the visitors and how they are going to behave. Every act and scenes of the characters

leads to the theme of absurdity that creates existential crisis throughout the play.

Character's silence as well as unknown fear proves that or creates the problem in their existence. This type of condition shows the illusive nature in the character's mind.

Stanley is helpless from all directions. He cannot express his thoughts well. The pauses and the ellipses are the wounds of his heart. He cannot speak well and begins to murmur. He is left in the desperate and void condition. He can neither go anywhere nor stay there. Stanley is abandoned in an absurd and uncertain condition, the world is not friendly and receptive rather hostile. Every body finds himself in void in this universe. The play is an enactment of grave subject matter in a funny and ridiculous way. The characters claiming the same thing again and again but not bringing that into action are farcical.

The most fundamental aspect of the play is a struggle for existence. Stanley is in existential crisis. He has no family, home, and job. He is pushed to the state of existential choice but finds no way. Though Meg helps Stanley, still he is in insecure position. He is not happy in the Boarding house. Not only Stanley, other characters are also searching their identity here and there. Stanley is an existential character. Stanley is eager to establish his place. Stanley feels that his position is not secure.

Silence is pervasive throughout the play. It also makes the play further uncertain and problematic in existence. The play opens with long silence. The audiences are confronted with the ambiguity of what is going to happen. Characters are involved in funny games time and again. But, the mystery behind such seemingly ridiculous activities is silent. The playwright does not open the mystery clearly. The events justify that such activities are the outcome of no way out and desperateness in them.

There is no more conversation as well as communication among the characters. Stanley only speaks out of his own fear and loneliness, his terror from the

newly strangers. Meg also only speaks about her house rather than not. There is uncertainty and irrationality which pervades identity. We audience are not able to know more information about Stanley's condition. How and why he has taken shelter in Meg's house is not informed. There is no clear indication of Goldberg and McCann also. In such a way, it seems there is no clear cut idea about their real identity which leads all the characters into existential crisis. There is not a close relationship between them. So characters are ready to search their identity.

The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the anxiety and despair. All the characters do not know their true nature and purpose. Stanley, the main character of the play does not know his own real true identity. Though, he arrives as a guest in Meg's family, Meg herself is also unaware of the identity of the boy named Stanley. He does not get fully support from Meg and others. So he is afraid of other two strangers. All the characters are afraid of each other. There is confusion and uncertainty of identity which leads the play to an existential problem among the characters.

All men die in solitude, all values are degraded in the Theatre of Absurd. The characters in *The Birthday party* are contemptuous of their present condition who are utterly in capable of facing or speaking the truth. There is no more conversation between all the characters. McCann and Stanley do not recognize with each other but McCann forcefully is going to organize Birthday party for Stanley. He feels he is alienated from him self. So, he remains silent in almost time. Despite all his actions, he is alienated again when he is snatched off from the house and is compelled to live absurd life.

There is also the suspense in the view of all characters. Some of the things that happen are not at all sinister in themselves but they all add to the accumulation of

tensions which will have to break like a storm, before the play is over. Stanley's scene with McCann is full of hidden menace, with odd little touches like having each of them whistle alternate snatches of a tune while the other speaks, so that the whistling is continuous through several lines of dialogue. When Stanley tries to leave, McCann forces him to stay without actually using any violence, but indicating that he will if necessary.

In the play, *The Birthday Party*, all the characters are in confusion and they are no more aware of their own passions. So, we can see the menace or a threat feeling in their activities. All are victimized by anxiety. Stanley seems very frightened and unsafe from other strangers. So, he remains silent. Goldberg and McCann are presented as strangers or intruders. Stanley lives in the boarding house in which these strangers plan to visit. Stanley becomes very afraid when he hears their arrival in the house. Stanley wants to change his name time and again. At last these strangers make him nervous. After this event, we do not know or find out his meaningful word to others. He remains in dilemma almost the time. He wants to create his existence but not success to get. Goldberg and McCann are also not able to specify their own identity. There is also some ambiguity in their beings. This type of ambiguousness shows the existential crisis in character's mind.

The dialogue is also not very clear in the play. It is not in sequential order. There are more irrelevant dialogues that the conversation is funny and there is contradictory in the view of characters. In such a way the characters cannot get their existence easily. The language used by the characters is full of pauses that support the theme of absurdity. The way the characters presented in the play hints the mystery of existence that challenges man every moment.

The prominent dramatist Pinter wants to show or present the meaninglessness of life. There is some relationship but not close relationship among the characters. It seems as a futile. All characters are roaming here and there which proved that they are searching their identities but there are some problems on their ways.

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